

Linda Clair
Five-day Meditation Retreat
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Transcription from Audio Recordings

File 2c – Sunday morning discussion session

Question: I just want to say how helpful I found those reminders. It somehow intensified my practice, or it's clarified my intention. I'm really grateful every time you bring something up or say something. It touches something inside, it intensifies the intention, or brings clarity there if I'm sleepy, it just sharpens everything. So, even though I have spent a lot of time coming back to the breath and the body, it feels much softer. Just sitting here I've really softened a lot. And I'm not sure what that is but the feeling is a lot has dropped away, even though I'm actually coming back a lot to the breath, and really trying to catch when that thought emerges.

Linda: And that's why you're coming back quite frequently, because you're not getting into a long train of thought. You can tend to feel sometimes when you're doing that that it's a sign that you're not meditating properly. There's this tendency to feel, "If it's not all thoughtless or really calm and peaceful I'm not doing it properly." And that's not it at all. It can be like that when you're actually in a really deep state because you just can't keep going with a train of thought – so it's breaking it. And that's what the counting does – it just adds that extra anchor to the body. Breaking it, breaking it, and it gets really monotonous and you'll tend to judge it and go, "Oh, this is really hard." And it's really tiring when you have a sit like that, but you'll often feel much clearer and softer after.

Question: Yeah, I have. I've been counting the whole time.

Linda: Good.

Question: I've found it really helpful, especially at the beginning of retreats. I've made sure I breathe into my belly as soon as I sit down and use the counting. And not thinking about it, I just do it.

Linda: So if you feel like counting the whole retreat do that. Don't feel it's just for a short time or a beginner's method or anything. It's a basic Zen practice that is used quite a bit. And I've used it quite a bit and it was great, really, really good.

That was a long sit L..

Question: Yes, I sat through the break and felt pretty good. Probably noticing more, it's more intensified than usual – haven't been to a retreat for a while – compared to just sitting at home. I feel like a quality that has been there in my sittings at home has been to be in the body as much as possible, and feel what's happening as closely as possible, without trying to change it. And I felt like I was getting a handle on that at home, and it's very different when it's so intense. With the less intense sensations and pain and so on I feel like I can be with it more, in an accepting kind of space. But with this I definitely feel a resistance, that I want to get away from it. So that sit had a lot to do with that – trying to feel that level of intensity and still being in the body.

Linda: Mm, and that's why it's so good to come into a situation like this. It's not that your practice at home isn't important – of course it's really important – but then when you come here it just takes it up quite a few notches. And it's almost like that was the preparation for being here.

Question: So is there anything else to do with that? Or is it just to feel it and not try to change it, and that's that?

Linda: Just do that. Your mind will come in and say, "There must be something else I can do to make this happen faster, to make it a bit easier" – but no. Exactly what you're describing – that's what you keep doing. But it's hard because you get impatient. So when you feel yourself getting impatient just come back and be really: "I'll put up with this for as long as I need to." And the impatience actually gets in the way. That's what gets in the way – not what's happening – it's your reaction to it. So just keep seeing that as closely as possible.

Question: The reaction to it?

Linda: Yep, the reaction to the resistance, the reaction to the pain, the reaction to everything. It's not what you see as happening, it's how you see it, so it's your reaction to it, and that's personal. Whereas, yeah, you just have to be patient. It's all to do with you and how you see things, not what is actually happening.

And people will watch something that is happening, and they might see exactly the same thing – everyone is going to have a different reaction to it, a different memory of it. So never trust your memory, that's a big thing too.

Recently, I think I said it before, before Mum died we were going through all these old school reports that mothers keep, some mothers keep, and I was reading all this stuff about myself. And I'd had a totally different memory of some of these events, and it sort of shocked me because I felt, "My memory is useless! What's the point? How I've remembered all this is purely emotional." There was a little bit of substance in it and fact, but a lot of it was just this emotional memory. I wasn't who I thought I was – I was totally different. So what's the point? There's no point in remembering things because most of it is emotional, an emotional reaction to an event.

Question: Based on the past? Is that what you're saying.

Linda: No, it's based on you, your reaction to something. It's all based on "me," it's all about me and how I saw something. And then reading the facts it was really interesting, because I hadn't looked at this stuff for a long time, but reading things it was like, "Oh, I had a different memory of this." But actually reading it, it was showing me that that's what actually happened. And I had dramatized it all, manipulated it, changed it to suit me, because that's how I thought it was. So I had this idea of this person who I was, this child who I was, and it wasn't true. So I'd say a huge component of most people's memories is emotional. So what's the point? It's just this story we weave about ourselves, about everything that's happening, that's often not the case.

Question: We get so caught up in it too.

Linda: Yeah, we do, we remember this stuff and say, "Wasn't that horrible, wasn't it awful?" And then someone else who might have gone through the same thing might just say, "Oh, that was fine."

So we elaborate on it and it keeps going, and we feel it, it's stored in our bodies, it just keeps going and going and going – and most of it is just an illusion, it's not true. The more you see this, the more you realise this, the desire to remember starts to decrease, until in the end you've got almost no desire to remember anything.

Because remembering – it's a bit like I'm talking to you and if I'm trying to remember what I'm saying or what you're saying – it's getting in the way of that connection, because there's something else happening. I'm going, "Oh, I've got to remember what L. said." That happens with most people's interactions with each other and something happening – they're trying to remember something. So what we're doing here is getting to the source of that desire to remember. It's not trying to forget, but it's practicing *not* trying to remember everything.

And then you look at something and it's just what you're looking at – the memory doesn't come into it, the judgment doesn't come into it. And it's great. You go into situations completely innocent and open because there's not all this stuff in the way – remembering what they said to me yesterday and how much that affected me and blah, blah, blah – so it's great. So I've got no idea what you just said and I don't need to know.

Question: Is it like returning home? When you're completely here, and totally here and present, did you feel like you had come home?

Linda: I know people use that description: "It's like coming home." I never felt that. I still feel it when I get on the Zafu – it feels like home. I just go, "Ah, it's so nice." But no, I didn't feel like I was coming home, I wouldn't describe it as that, but I know a lot of people do. It's just a feeling of being completely at ease. Ninety-nine point nine percent of the fear goes but I wouldn't say there's nothing. And that's what's so great about it because there's just more that keeps happening.

Question: So you don't have that sense that you're returning to something that was always here?

Linda: No, I didn't have that sense. No, I don't feel a sense of returning to something because it's all new. So returning to something is returning to something that you know, whereas this is all completely new. So I don't feel like I'm returning to anything. It's like it's all new territory. Although, like I said, there's still a shadow of residual past there that comes up every now and again, related to a different situation in my life, and I just see it, and it's gone.

Question: So with the permanence, there's this permanence about you – it's probably not the right word.

Linda: No, I'd say impermanent rather than permanent. And that's what becomes your security, the impermanence, not the permanent. When you attach to something it's like you're trying to make it permanent and fixed, whereas this is different. It's not wanting to do that anymore. In fact you can't do that anymore, you're moving too fast. Attaching to things slows you down. It's like you're going down a river and you keep trying to grab on to something. Eventually you stop doing that, you don't want to, and you just flow.

So the fear of the unknown eventually becomes joy of the unknown – it's just amazing.

Question: Yeah, you don't become the unknown, it's the joy of the unknown that you...

Linda: Oh, I don't know, maybe you do become the unknown.

Question: I get a little confused with my feelings – sometimes I am in the flow of the river and then other times I'm like the reservoir that you mentioned.

Linda: Reservoir? What reservoir?

Question: Like a dam bursting, you said once.

Linda: Did I? I don't remember that.

Question: Sometimes it feels like I am filling up and up, and other times it's like the river. And it can be a bit like, "What am I?"

Linda: It's not the question. What you are is not the question. It's, "Where am I? – I am here." You'll never find out who you are. You'll just give up asking – you don't even bother asking – there's no need to ask anymore. But initially you think that's the question because you're so obsessed with yourself. You think, "I'm the centre of everything so I need to know who I am." It's really not the question.

Question: Is that why we desire the memories, to try and play ourselves in time?

Linda: Yeah, to define ourselves using our past, and avoid being here. So you don't need to be a product of your past, although everything that has ever happened in your life has brought you to this point. But it doesn't mean that you're a product of that. And so many people make themselves a product of their past: "I'm this because this happened to me."

Question: Out of a fear of being stateless?

Linda: Yeah, fear of being nobody, whereas that's the most amazing feeling. When I was talking about bliss – yeah, you can feel bliss, bliss is really nice – but there's something *much* beyond that where there's no one feeling anything. Because even with bliss there's a slight feeling of someone feeling this bliss, but when that goes, when there's no one there – which is the greatest fear – it's the most amazing thing. And then there's not this desire to feel anything in particular.

Question: When there's nobody there is that the "unity" that we read about where there's no barrier, no boundary, a complete sense of unity with everything? Is that that thing?

Linda: I suppose, yeah. And it doesn't sound very attractive if you say there's no one feeling anything. Your mind will come in and go, "Oh, what's the point?" Because all I want to do is feel something, feel good, feel bliss, feel this. And things you *don't* want to feel – that's just as important – "I *don't* want to feel this, I want to feel this."

Question: I need help. I'm not sure what to do. My left shoulder – this has been going for a while but it never really bothered me – but now whenever I'm sitting it starts to move on it's own. Or tensions, and sometimes the pain, or sensations radiate towards my chest or down my arm. And it moves on it's own at different times.

Linda: I'd say don't worry about it. Just let it go. Is it just moving a bit?

Question: Yes, it goes up and down.

Linda: So you've got tension there? It's a bit painful?

Question: There is tension but I'm trying not to label anything.

Linda: I'd say breathe into it, breathe down here as well, and don't worry too much about it moving around a bit. If it becomes really pronounced maybe try and keep a bit stiller. But that can happen – just an energetic thing. How long has it been happening?

Question: Since I've been seeing you, for about a year, but it goes away then comes again. When I'm doing trembling it's crazy. My will is not to do anything with pain, not to go close or away – if I can go back I step back – because I've got a surrender or giving up kind of attitude right now. Like, these things will just keep happening and I just need to be there in the now.

Linda: With the pain sometimes though it is interesting to really breathe into it and feel it and not try and back away from it. And then it sometimes changes and turns into more energy, or the judgment of it changes, your attitude to it changes. And then it breaks up a bit and you feel it more as pure energy.

The shoulder – it could be anything, it could be a physical weakness, or somewhere that you've stored a lot of tension that's just coming out now, so I wouldn't worry too much about that. But with the pain, watch it, just watch that when you step back you're not trying to avoid it by doing that, or just putting up with it rather than really being with it. So experiment with that a bit. Where are you getting pain?

So it's mainly your shoulder. I'd say just watch it and don't worry too much about it moving a bit. Really *feeling* it. And be careful you don't use the breath to try and get away from anything. It's just to anchor you so you're more stable. That's why I say don't focus on it because if you focus on something you're really trying to exclude something else. So use the breath as an anchor and see what happens. It will change, things will chop and change.

Question: I spoke to you in March about having some trembling while I was sitting, and it comes and goes. But recently it has become quite violent so I have started physically stopping it. Is that okay?

Linda: Quite violent? Is it when you're sitting at home?

Question: So I've just started saying, "No!"

Linda: And what happens when you say no?

Question: I can hold it.

Linda: And then what happens?

Question: It stops then and goes away.

Linda: It's a tricky thing because something like that can become a habit and then take over the whole...

Question: That's why I started to stop it, because I thought this is going to be a habit. Sounds a silly thing to say but it doesn't feel habitual. It just comes spontaneously, and then it goes.

Linda: And how long does it last?

Question: Probably about half a minute if I let it go.

Linda: So only half and minute and then it stops. Mm, it's tricky.

Question: Am I expending energy that I should be...?

Linda: Not necessarily – there's a balance. And for some people the trembling like that is an energetic thing and it's doing the opposite – it's bringing you more into your body and softening your body. So I'd say if you feel like it's getting a bit out of hand just stop it for a while and see what happens. I'm not exactly sure – I'd say experiment with it.

Question: Is yawning a way of discharging energy too?

Linda: Sometimes, some people yawn when they're nervous as well, when they're anxious. Sometimes it is, sometimes it's just that you're just tired. I wouldn't worry too much about the yawning. Often it's a release of tension.

Question: I've been wanting to yawn but I swallow them.

Linda: Swallowing is a very similar thing. So don't worry too much about that.

Question: I was afraid I was undoing all the good work of putting in the energy.

Linda: No. It's different for everyone, the trembling thing. I'd say for you, if it's just for short periods, it's probably fine, I'd say it's fine.